



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Breaking Open the Word First Sunday of Lent C



Temptation of Christ (The Temptation on the Mount). Maestà by Duccio di Buoninsegna,
Tempera on wood, 214 x 412 cm Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer in Preparation for Baptism and in Preparation for Renewing Baptismal Promises

Almighty God, who rules all things,
we hasten with eager steps to the venerable font of eternal salvation,
and ask your magnificence
that you command this font which has been sealed
may be reopened with the keys of your mercy,
and impart to those that thirst a most sweet cup of water.
May the voice of your divinity sound upon these waters,
may the Spirit of your sanctification dwell therein
and bring healing to all ill.
May the abundant streams of paradise flow from it,
that by your goodness heavenly graces
may be bestowed upon these new-born children.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Liber Ordium. *Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica*, edd. Cabrol and
Leclercq, Vol. 5, ed. Dom M. Ferotin, Paris, 1904.

Catholic
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& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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LITURGICAL CONTEXT

- ▶ Today is the first Sunday of Lent.
- ▶ The elect are celebrating the rite of sending for election in the parish and the rite of election at the Cathedral.
- ▶ Lent coincides with the third period of the catechumenate, the period of Purification and Enlightenment—the final spiritual preparation for the Easter sacraments by those preparing for baptism.
- ▶ Lent is also spiritual preparation for the faithful who prepare to renew their baptismal promises at Easter.
- ▶ The themes of Lent are both baptismal and penitential.
- ▶ The elect and the faithful examine their lives in order to uncover the areas of sin and their need for healing and forgiveness.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Deuteronomy 26: 1-10

- ▶ Moses told the people that his father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt and formed a great nation. When they were oppressed God heard their prayer and brought them out of Egypt.
- ▶ Today's reading from Deuteronomy is part of an ancient liturgy of thanks for the harvest. God was truly the Master of the universe and Lord of the people.
- ▶ This reading, like all three readings today is a confession of faith in God.
- ▶ God entered into a lasting covenant with the people.
- ▶ God fulfilled his promises to the people. The people promised to live according to God's Law and God promised in return to be their God and provide for their needs.
- ▶ God was faithful to the covenant. He delivered the people from bondage in Egypt. God was active in their history; he was not distant or aloof.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ In what way has God been faithful to you?
- ▶ In what way have you responded to God’s covenant with you?
- ▶ In what way have you fallen short?

Second Reading: Romans 10: 8-13

- ▶ If you confess that Jesus is Lord you will be saved.
- ▶ All one needs to do to be saved is profess faith in Jesus Christ.
- ▶ The rest is up to the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Paul was careful not to alienate the Roman Jews, but he did challenge rigid legalism and the belief that one could earn salvation.
- ▶ Paul affirmed that Jesus died once and for all for the salvation of the world. His was a perfect, completely gratuitous sacrifice of love.
- ▶ This reading was chosen because of the confession of faith inherent in the reading.
- ▶ Lent is an invitation to recommit to our faith in Christ, the Savior of the World.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Have you ever confessed faith in Jesus only to be ridiculed?

Gospel: Luke 4: 1-13

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert and tempted by the devil.
- ▶ In the Scriptures the desert is a barren place of encounter with God.
- ▶ For the Christian the desert is a symbol of the inner life and the inner struggle.
- ▶ All three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. God entered into a covenant with the people of Israel in the desert.
- ▶ Jesus' encounter in the desert definitively revealed what Jesus' mission was NOT meant to be—a showy demonstration of power. Israel was unfaithful in the desert; Jesus was not only faithful, but he was victorious over the power and influence of evil. He resisted temptation and won the day.
- ▶ Today's story is a message of hope. Jesus' victory over Satan gives us the hope and the encouragement to know we too can overcome temptation. Christ's Spirit is given to the church to strengthen us to prevail.
- ▶ We are to take note of the tools Jesus had in his arsenal. Jesus' knowledge and use of Scripture and his reliance on the Holy Spirit. "The word is the weapon but the Holy Spirit engages in the battle. (Mary Birmingham, Word and Worship Workbook, Year C, Paulist Press, 130.)
- ▶ Ultimately, Satan tested Jesus' commitment to the will of his Father. Believers can do no less than confess faith in the Christ who was victorious over sin and evil. It is he who journeys with us throughout the season of Lent.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ In what way is this Gospel a message of hope for you at this time in your

life?

- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about how we are to engage the power of evil in our lives?
- ▶ What is your understanding of temptation? Do you feel guilty because of your temptations? What does Jesus teach us about how we should approach the temptations in our lives?
- ▶ What is the greatest temptation you face at this time in your life? What did you learn from this Gospel that will help you overcome your temptations?
- ▶ Another challenge of this Gospel is to confess faith in Jesus Christ. What did you learn about Jesus in this Gospel? How would you craft your own personal confession of faith in Christ?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

APPENDIX

#1. God has remained faithful to me throughout all the challenges of life. God has upheld me in every crisis. My daughter's life was spared in 9/11. In spite of the miscarriages of two desperately wanted grandchildren, my other daughter subsequently had two beautiful children, giving me two precious grandchildren. God has walked with our family through all the major events of our lives. God has been faithful to me. God has been faithful to my family.

I, on the other hand, find myself arguing with God every time a life event takes us to the edge. I am reluctant to face the trials of life. My argument with God sounds like that of St. Theresa: "If this is how you treat your friends it is no wonder you have so few!" Like the Israelites in the desert I grumble and complain even though I entered into a covenant with God and promised to join the trials of life to his Paschal Mystery. Should I have expected anything else? This Lent I am called to renew my reliance on God and trust him to be faithful to the commitment he has forged with me. My confession of faith in him is EMMANUEL—GOD WITH US! I know from first hand experience the truth of that acclamation!

2. Lent is a time for me to renew my faith in Christ—to acknowledge that he is the Lord of my life and to live as though I mean it. I repeatedly confess faith in Christ in the context of my formal ministry. I have never been rejected for my confession of faith, except by the voices of doubt that reside within myself.

For the past several years I have lived a desert existence. I have struggled with doubt at every twist and turn in my Christian journey. Like Jesus in the desert I constantly tackle the voice that antagonizes me and tells me that Christ is not who I profess him to be.

I thank God for the multitude of ways he has protected me from such temptation and has acted in my life over the years. That history is my strength. When I recall Jesus' action throughout my life I remain strong in the face of doubt. There is power in remembering. Jesus told us to remember because he knew we so easily forget. He gave us signs so that we would not forget. He gifted us with signs of his presence. Remembering those signs has kept me strong in faith and compels me to affirm my constant prayer, "I praise you O Lord and I bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."

3. The greatest temptation I face is the temptation to stop trusting God when it comes to my child's illness. I desperately want him to be healed. When healing is not forth coming, even though I know better, I feel abandoned by God. This gospel reminds me that I have tools at my disposal to fight against this temptation. When I turn to Scripture I am reminded that God never promised to heal every ill and to do everything we ask of him in the way we ask. He promised to be with us. I know from past experience that when I turn the entire situation

over to God the situation improved, not only for me, but also for my child. My challenge is to abandon my life to God's care BEFORE I succumb to fear and despair. Today's Gospel reminds me that I am not alone in that struggle.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

*Season of Lent
Sin and Grace*

*Sacrament of Reconciliation
Evangelization*

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SEASON OF LENT

This is the First Sunday of Lent. The six weeks of Lent are a time of baptismal and penitential preparation for the Easter sacraments. Today's session will focus on the Season of Lent—what we believe and what we celebrate.

SIN AND GRACE

Jesus exhorts us to follow his commands. The season of Lent is a time we examine our lives in the light of the Gospel. We look at what is sinful and defective and we call upon the grace of God to heal and reconcile. Today's extended session will focus on the Church's teaching regarding SIN AND GRACE.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Lent is a time we focus on the areas of sin in our lives and our need for God's mercy. It is also a time when the church offers multiple opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Jesus was tempted in today's Gospel. We too are tempted; we sin when we succumb to temptation. The sacrament of reconciliation extends God's mercy and the reconciling presence of Christ. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.

EVANGELIZATION

All three readings in today's liturgy include a confession of faith; faith in God and faith in Christ. We are all called to make a confession of faith and to share our faith with others. The heart of evangelization is that confession of faith. Today's doctrinal session will focus on EVANGELIZATION—the realization of the confession of faith called for in today's liturgy.